



Making Social Work Plans and Assessments

Keith Goodman





INTRODUCTION

One possible benefit of artistic and cultural activities is to create a safe space where people feel able to express themselves. Connecting with and making art and culture can enable a space in which communication and relationships can develop (relationship-based practice). Art or culture can be any ‘thing’ we choose to focus on from a poem to a car or a football kit.

This tool explores how social workers can develop creativity in their practice and use cultural spaces such as museums, galleries, cinemas, music venues, skateparks, restaurants, football matches and so on as spaces for social work. With younger children this can involve play – or playfulness with older children and adults.

This tool starts with outlining key concepts behind these ideas, then looks at ideas for undertaking direct work to support co-producing assessments and plans with children, young people, and adults in creative ways when you have limited time.

Key Concepts

There are four key concepts that underpin this way of working:

1 CO-PRODUCTION

Service users are viewed as *knowledgeable about their own circumstances* and therefore capable of making decisions, exercising control, and ultimately improving services. Professionals are seen as facilitators rather than problem fixers, thus transforming the perception of service users from passive recipients of services to partners who contribute to the process of shaping the services they receive and, ultimately how services are designed and delivered.

2 AUTHENTIC VOICES

“Authentic Voices is about seeking your voice, an authentic voice, a voice with which to speak with one’s experience and one’s ability to learn from experience... It is about helping others (students, service users, patients, clients) to find their own voices.” (Winter 1998 quoted in Trevitt and Chadma 2009)

The history of social work has evolved from a model in the 1970s focused on the exploration of service user’s opinions to an *approach focused on person-centredness and user-led services*. There are three mandates for service user involvement: the legal and policy mandate; the professional mandate (codes of practice); and the service user mandate. Social work is about enabling others to find their voices which can start from a conversation about likes and dislikes, from your favourite colour to your favourite picture or building. The working relationship you build with a service user starts one conversation at a time from safer subject matter like my favourite song, picture or building to more sensitive subject matter of their experiences, their fears to their hopes and dreams for the future.





3 RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE

In her review of child protection, Eileen Munro (2011) highlighted the importance of relationship-based practice in social work that acknowledges the role of intuitive understanding and emotional responses in reasoning and decision-making. Social workers therefore require skills in forming relationships to engage with people to understand the issues that will then help to promote change. Consequently, *assessment is a relational as well as a technical activity* and the relationship formed in an assessment can be an important part of the intervention. There is considerable research evidence that relationship skills or relationship-based practice is important in helping people to change, whatever the intervention method is being used.

4 THE THIRD OBJECT

Third Objects are transitional objects such as blankets, teddy bears, dolls, action figures. As children develop and begin to realise that they are separate beings from their primary carers, they use these objects for attachment or comfort. Parents, carers, social workers, nurses or doctors can find themselves talking to the third object as children may communicate their feelings or distress via their object: 'My Teddy is not well or doesn't want me to go to nursery today'. Communication via the third object can feel safer for the child, as they're not telling you this, but their teddy is. These ideas are based on Object Relations Theory from child psychology, and link to ideas around imaginative play and symbolic thought and attachment theory.

This role of a third object can continue into adulthood. Art and culture such as football, music or knitting can be a useful third object enabling communication that feels safe, where both service users and professionals can express interests and ideas and where the power differential can be more even. In this safe space relationship-based practice develops.

Direct Work and Communication Tools

This section outlines some ideas for undertaking direct work and communication and the use of the third object in that process. The ideas here can be used in different ways from getting to know each other to exploring wishes and feelings or identity and self-esteem.

It Starts with a Conversation!

It Starts with a Conversation! is a simple idea to make a creative badge or even just talk about what your badge would look like. Relationship-based practice ultimately starts with a conversation and the ideas below from simple starting points like making a badge, discussing a picture, a photo, film, advert, rap or even looking up at the clouds and asking what can you see? These ideas are about beginning that dialogue in a safe way to developing a working relationship and ultimately to support a change process...

Participants can draw in a picture on the badge or write down the answer or you can come up with other questions including:

What makes you happy?

What makes you sad?

I want to be a ...

My dream is to ...

My favourite music is ...

My favourite colour is ...

My favourite team is ...

My favourite food is ...

Creative Me Badges

Something you are good at doing

Something you like doing

Something that is very special to you

Something you do to help others

An arrow points to the bottom center of the circle.



Drawing together

Drawing together can be a powerful leveller at any age and help reduce barriers between a child and a social worker. Depending on the age and stage of development of a child, if both for example draw a simple car, train, a picture of yourselves or of each other, this can generate fun and laughter. If you know the child or young person's interest, then you can bring a picture or object to share and talk about or find one on your tablet or phone. Drawing together can lead onto drawing pictures of family, friends, favourite things and what social workers are very familiar with – eco-maps and further along the line family trees (genograms).

Working with play dough is another medium that can be useful as a third object. While you talk about what they are making and play alongside each other, you can move the discussion to other topics.

With young people or adults, the above ideas can be used and can be fun. The use of art or cultural objects such as paintings and sculptures or fashion or music can be used as the third object. You can choose a piece of music, an image, a building or an item of clothing to talk about ... In preparation for an introductory meeting you might ask them to choose a picture, or favourite object they would like to talk about and that you will choose one too.

Visiting a Gallery - online

Here Rachel Noel, Convenor for Young People's Programme at Tate Modern and Tate Britain has suggested a list of online works of art which can spark a conversation which may reveal more about the person you are working with and their likes and dislikes. [Click on the arrows to visit each artwork online.](#)



Start Gallery (display) designed as an introduction to some of the most popular works in the Tate collection, and explores the accessible theme of colour.



The End of the Twentieth Century, Joseph Beuys
death, regeneration, recovery, hope, nature



Monument for the Living, Marwan Rechmaoui
unresolved conflict, past, reconciliation



Babel, Cildo Meireles
speech, language, communication, space and infinity



Untitled, Fahrelnissa Zeid
movement, chaos, repetition, rhythm



Reborn Sounds of Childhood Dreams, Ibrahim El-Salahi
memory, dreams, sound



Trial and Error, Meredith Frampton
objects, life



A Bigger Splash, David Hockney
movement, nature, escapism

Visiting a Gallery - online

Art and wellbeing quiz

www.tate.org.uk/art/quiz-how-are-you-feeling

A guide to slow looking

www.tate.org.uk/art/guide-slow-looking

Teaching resources

www.tate.org.uk/art/teaching-resource



REFERENCES

Co-production: <https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/co-production-in-commissioning-tool/co-production/In-more-detail/what-is-co-production/>

Munro, E (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection*. Final report, A Child Centred System. TSO.

Needham, C. and Carr, S. (2009). *SCIE Research briefing 31: Co-production: an emerging evidence base for adult social care transformation*. London: SCIE

Trevitt, C. Chandima, P. (2009) 'Self and continuing professional learning (development): issues of curriculum and identity in developing academic practice', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14: 4, 347–359. Routledge.

Relationship Based Practice in SW: <https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/emotions-relationships-and-resilience/building-relationships/how-relationship-based-are-you-as-a-social-worker/>

Navigating the Tate, Art in the Collection: Queer lives and art <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/queer-lives-art>

Black identities and art
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/black-identities-and-art>

DisABILITY and art
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/disability-and-art>

AUTHOR

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